

Leeds Church Institute.

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(Rule 25.)



A sermon preached in Eaton Chapel Eaton Square

THE

LORD'S SUPPER NO MYSTERY.

by L. Minton

“For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come.”—I COR. xi. 26.

THE recent judgment of the Privy Council has probably brought to a conclusion, as far as the courts of law are concerned, the long struggle between the two parties into which the Church of England has always been divided, and whose antagonism, having slumbered during the religious torpor of the last century, has only been brought to a head during the present generation. Decision after decision has been given, until there seems hardly anything left to decide. Some one may possibly yet be caught tripping, if it is thought worth while to prosecute him. But it is quite evident that a clergyman need only exercise the most moderate degree of caution to enable him to promulgate from the pulpit, or the press, almost anything he pleases. It has been said that Mr. Voysey was lost by his honesty, and Mr. Bennett saved by his cleverness. Rather, by accident. For if Dr. Pusey had not induced him to alter two or three words in the second edition of his book, he would certainly have been condemned. Yet he distinctly avowed that the alteration of the words made not the slightest alteration in his meaning; and very few persons indeed can even now discover any difference between them whatever. His corrected words convey exactly the same impression as his first, and the effect of them would be precisely the same upon any congregation that received his teaching. With a little

caution Mr. Voysey might have propagated his infidelity just as safely as Mr. Bennett can propagate his Popery within the pale of the English Church.

The issue, therefore, to which we are brought, as regards the Lord's Supper, is this:—

1. The Church of England is authoritatively declared to lend no countenance to Romish error. On the whole, it is distinctly Protestant and Evangelical. And it would be marvellous if it were not so. For in England the battle of the Reformation was mainly fought on this very matter of the Lord's Supper. The compilers of the Prayer-book *tried to exclude* the Romish doctrine; and till now, it was supposed that they had done it pretty effectually.

2. It is decided that Romish practices, such as outward acts of adoration to the bread and wine, with other things of a like nature, are absolutely forbidden; so that the *administration* of the Lord's Supper must be Protestant in *form*.

3. But it is also decided that a clergyman may *teach* what very few persons indeed can distinguish from Romish doctrine, and what is essentially the same thing, provided he abstains from using certain words which would constitute a *verbal* contradiction of the Articles. He may not say there is a corporal—*i.e.*, a *bodily*—presence of Christ in the elements; but he may say there is a real, actual, objective presence.

Here are the facts, and we had better look them in the face. It is no use criticising the judgment or the judges. The thing is done and cannot be undone. We should be following a very bad example if we began to rail at a court of final appeal because, in this case, it has disappointed our expectations. We must accept the position as it is, and consider what is our own duty under the circumstances.

A few of the more impetuous-spirits are inclined to

wipe their hands of the thing altogether, and leave a Church which even *tolerates*, though without sanctioning, what they believe to be so erroneous. But I confess that I cannot see the necessity for this. So long as we have the main teaching of the Church with us, and are neither required to do anything we disapprove of, nor prevented from proclaiming, as far as we know it, all the counsel of God, we are surely not called upon to abandon our position and leave the whole field to our opponents, because they are legally permitted to promulgate some private opinions of their own from which we dissent, and to which the Church lends no countenance. I have very little doubt that the Church of England will soon be broken up. She has now little more than half the *worshipping* population of England and Wales. And in these days it would be exceedingly difficult to maintain a State Establishment under such circumstances. But when, in addition to that, we find this house violently divided against itself, and many of its members, lay and clerical, so dissatisfied with it, on one side or the other, that they would not move a finger to save it—nay, in some cases, are *advocates* for its separation from the State—it really seems that nothing short of a miracle can avert its fall. However, it is clearly our policy to remain where we are, if possible, to the last. And it will be time enough then for each of us to determine whether we shall join any, and if so, which, of the several churches into which disestablishment will at once divide us.

Meanwhile, the responsibility imposed upon us by the present state of things is to teach more clearly and decidedly than ever the plain Scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps, on the whole, we have rather failed in this. We have been too nervous about appearing to contradict some ambiguous expression in the formularies of our Church, or being accused of taking a low view of the ordinance. The highest view of the ordinance

must be the *Scriptural* view. And when we just take our ideas of it from the words of Christ and His Apostles, without regarding anything else, nothing can exceed its simple grandeur. It is full of deep teaching, but it is intelligible teaching. There is no mystery about it whatever, in the popular sense of the word mystery. The moment you introduce mystery you introduce mystification; and when once mystification begins, the Privy Council has plainly demonstrated that it is impossible to put any limit to it.

A mystery originally meant the revelation of some secret, which otherwise could not have been known. It did not mean that the thing was unintelligible when made known; but that it *required* to be made known. The person and work of Christ are called the "Mystery of Godliness"—not as meaning that they are beyond our comprehension, but that they *enable* us to comprehend, as far as we need to comprehend, God and godliness. Christ is the revealer of His Father, and thus is the great Mystery of Godliness. Again, the same Apostle says:—"Behold, I show you a *mystery*. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." It is true that we cannot comprehend *how* the change in our bodies will be effected. But that is not what Paul meant. He meant to *reveal* the *fact* that we *shall* be changed; to open the secret to us, as far as we need at present to know it. So, in our Prayer-book, the Lord's Supper is called "these holy mysteries," not meaning that the ordinance is unintelligible, but that it is a revealing, teaching ordinance. Still it is a great misfortune that the expression is used, because of its being so liable to convey a wrong impression. And the same remark may be made on the words, "verily and indeed taken and eaten by the faithful in the Lord's Supper." Viewed in connection with all the other statements of our Church, they *can* only refer to the feeding upon Christ in our *hearts* by *faith*. But still they

have an ambiguous sound, and it is much better to admit this at once. They are not quite in harmony with the key-note of the Church's doctrine. And instead of allowing that to obscure and embarrass our teaching, instead of trying to make our testimony exactly answer to that ambiguity, we ought to be all the more clear and decided in enunciating the plain Scriptural truth, so that there may be no mistake about it whatever. We must never tire of insisting—1st, that the bread and wine simply represent to our imagination the risen glorified body of Christ, and, as distinct from that, the blood-shedding, or death, of His natural body on Calvary; 2nd, that our eating and drinking the bread and wine represent the action of faith by which we personally appropriate to ourselves, and spiritually feed upon, the benefits to be derived from union with Christ; 3rd, that our *united* partaking of the bread and wine *represents* our spiritual union with one another through our common union with Christ, and *constitutes* our union in an outward visible organisation, called the Church; 4th, that the only possible way in which, from the nature of things, the ordinance *can* benefit us, is by the effect which it produces on our minds as a symbolical rite instituted by Christ Himself. The outward acts bring before us spiritual truths, and thereby quicken our faith. "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show (literally *preach*) the Lord's death till He come." It is a preaching ordinance, and nothing else. In the Gospel, Christ is preached by words; in the Lord's Supper, He is preached by symbols. And whether you eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood more effectually by a sermon, by a communion, or by private meditation, depends entirely upon which of them brings Christ the most vividly before your mind. The *nature* of the benefit they confer upon you is precisely the same; and there *can* be no other.

This accounts for the undoubted fact that there are

Christians—amongst the Quakers, for instance—who never receive the communion at all, and have never even been baptized; yet in whom Christ is manifestly formed as fully and completely as in any Christian that ever lived. According to the high sacramental theory, here are living men who have never been born—for only baptism can regenerate; and strong, healthy men, who never take food—for it is only in the Lord's Supper that you can eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood. One might really suppose that Quakerism was permitted as a standing visible refutation of high sacramentalism.

Of course it will be asked—Why perpetuate the sacraments, if people can do so well without them? But it might as well be argued that because some persons can like and thrive on a certain diet, therefore all can—that because one person can dispense with a certain mode of taking food, therefore all can. The fact of our Lord having manifestly intended the two sacraments to be perpetual ordinances in His Church, is a sufficient proof that they must be generally beneficial. And no one who believes that Christ did mean them to be perpetual ordinances can neglect them without spiritual injury. But when a person has been taught from childhood—or has recoiled from the gross superstitions which have in all ages encrusted the two sacraments, into the belief—that they could not have been intended to be permanent rites, then, on any Scriptural view of their purpose, there is nothing to prevent him obtaining all the spiritual food he requires, just as you obtain it, and can only obtain it, by faith. The Spirit of Christ dwelling in him can strengthen his faith *without* the ordinance just as easily as He can strengthen your faith *by* the ordinance. All this is quite consistent with the very highest estimation of the ordinance, *as a means of strengthening our faith*. But when we apply to it our Lord's words, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life

in you," we are met by the fact that some Christians *have* life in them, who never partake of the sacramental bread and wine.

And now let us look more closely at that strange perversion of the ordinance, which is one of the most bewildering things in the history of Christianity. It may be expressed briefly as the doctrine of the Real Presence, whether accompanied or not by that of Transubstantiation. The Church of Rome holds that, after priestly consecration, what you see is no longer bread and wine, but the body and blood of Christ. Others hold that the bread and wine remain, but that the body and blood of Christ are there also. In the latter case, you see, and feel, and taste one of the things that is put into your mouth, but not the other. In the former, you see, and feel, and taste what is not there at all, and are unable to see, or feel, or taste what *is* there. This, of course, involves an additional miracle—namely, the continued appearance of the bread and wine to all the senses after they have ceased to exist. But the miracle of having an entire human body in your mouth, without any perceptible evidence of it, is so stupendous, that to be required to disbelieve in the reality of the piece of bread which does seem to be there, is scarcely an appreciable addition to the tax upon your faith. If Christ's body and blood are really there, it matters not one iota whether bread and wine are there also. The only question is, whether Christ's body and blood *are* there or not.

If any one thinks that this is too monstrous a proposition to argue about at all, and that we are wasting precious time in even alluding to it, let him remember that it is the belief of more than a hundred millions of Christians at this moment, some of them members, and even ministers, of our own Church; that it has been the belief of a vast majority of Christendom for more than a thousand years; and that we have ourselves seen persons of education, piety,

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and on all other subjects, of intelligence, adopt this view, after spending half their lives under the full light of the Gospel—facts which constitute almost as great a miracle as the Real Presence itself.

Now, there can be no more striking contrast than that between the perfect simplicity of the question itself and the cloud of metaphysical words with which it is commonly mystified. I verily believe that, but for this mystification, hardly any man in his senses could be brought to believe it. The truth is, that its advocates really do not know what they believe. They contend for certain words, but when pressed as to the meaning of those words, their ideas, if any, are found to be so utterly hazy and impossible to grasp, that they cannot properly be said to have any actual belief on the subject at all. And, with all due respect to the Committee of Privy Council, they have in their recent judgment most unfortunately encouraged this unintelligent mystification, by saying that the Lord's Supper relates to matters which can be "very imperfectly comprehended by the human understanding." No doubt there are truths, such as the Divine and human natures united in Christ, which we can very imperfectly comprehend. But the one question in dispute—namely, whether a human body can be present in two or more places at once—is as easily comprehended by the human understanding as any proposition that could be submitted to it. The question is not about Christ's Divine presence. His Godhead is everywhere present. The question is, whether *His body and blood* are present in the bread and wine. And the human reason is capable of pronouncing upon that as decisively and authoritatively as on any question whatever. You have only to clear away the mist of ambiguous words by which they try to persuade you that it is something beyond your power to decide—you have only to see what the Real Presence is, if it is anything at all—to be able to pronounce as certainly as your

mind can pronounce upon anything whatever, that it is an absolute impossibility from the very nature of things.

If any of you have become mystified about it, the best service I can render you is to remove the obscurity, and show you in the simplest possible way what the question really is. You have, perhaps, discovered that the battle seems to rage around the words "objective" and "subjective." To one acquainted with the philosophical use of terms this is plain enough. But common people are puzzled, and think that something beyond the grasp of their minds must lie under these hard words. Let me satisfy you that it is not so. If a friend were sitting with you in a room, he would be said to be objectively present in that room—whether you *knew* that he was there or not. You might be blind and deaf, or fast asleep; but his objective presence—*i.e.*, his *actual* presence—would be there all the same. On the other hand, if he were in India, and you were looking at his picture and thinking of him, he would be *objectively* absent from you, but *subjectively* present—*i.e.*, present to your mind. Now, if a dispute arose amongst some philosophical bystanders as to whether the body of your friend, which you and they knew to be in India, was really present in the picture you held in your hand, you might be exceedingly puzzled by some of the *words* they used, and might flounder about hopelessly if you got entangled in the controversy; but as to the *facts*, you would not have the slightest doubt or difficulty whatever. You might not be able to express in perfectly accurate language the difference between your friend's bodily absence and his presence to your mind; but you would *know* the difference, and nothing could persuade you that there was any mystery in it. Even a child would feel no difficulty about the matter until you began to puzzle him.

Now, there is not one particle more difficulty or mystery

about the question of the Real Presence. All you have to do is to disperse the cloud of words that are used to prevent your seeing the question in its naked simplicity. Just remember that there are only two ways in which a material body *can* be present—either objectively in its own substance, or subjectively to your mind. Test by this one of the favourite words for mystifying the matter. It is said that Christ's body and blood are "spiritually" present in the elements. A moment's thought will show that this is a contradiction in terms. How can a *body* be *spiritually* present, except in the figurative sense of being present to the spirit of one who is thinking of it? You might as well talk about the solar presence of the moon, or the lunar presence of the sun, or the chemical properties of arithmetic, or the astronomical powers of the Greek language, or the logical accuracy of horse exercise, or any other absurdity. What presence *can* a body have except bodily presence? What air can there be at night except night air? It is quite true that Christ's glorified body is, what St. Paul says ours will be, "a spiritual body"—that is, a body perfectly adapted to be the habitation and instrument of the glorified spirit. But that makes not the smallest difference to the present question. For, whatever the *nature* of Christ's glorified body may be, it is still a *body*; and, whatever it is made of, it is just as impossible for it to be in two places at once, as it is for our bodies to be so. An *angel* has a spiritual body, though of what kind we know not; but an angel can no more be in two places at once than you can. An electric spark can pass eight times round the earth in one second; but it can no more be in two places at once than the slowest-moving thing in creation. You have only, I repeat, to sweep away all the mystification by which controversialists throw dust in your eyes, in order to be as certain that the Real Presence is an absolute physical impossibility, as you are of your own existence. Can a human body be whole and

entire in the hands or the mouths of a million of persons at once? If it cannot, there's an end of the matter. And I ask whether any more simple question could be propounded? Not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible, by the human understanding! The province of reason as applied to it very limited! Then there is an end of *alibis*. What use is it proving that a man was a hundred miles off when a murder was committed? He may have been in both places at the same moment.

But even this is not all. Since writing the above, a most admirable letter from the Dean of Ripon has appeared in the *Times*, in which he shows that, if you cannot trust the evidence of your senses as to the distinction between a piece of bread and a human body, you have no evidence whatever for the resurrection of Christ—indeed, he might have said, for anything else.

We learn (he writes) from St. Luke that Christ showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs (*τεκμηρίοις*). These are recorded by the evangelists. He said, "Behold My hands and My feet that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have." All such proofs were addressed to the senses of the Apostles, and the result was a process of clear and conclusive reasoning. The human mind is not capable of clearer proof on any practical subject than that which is derived from the testimony of the senses, and the consequent deductions of the reason. Such was the proof, satisfactory, and as far as human consciousness is concerned, infallible, which was given of the resurrection of Christ. Before His death His flesh was similar to ours. "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same." His flesh, then, was an object of sense, concerning which men might fairly reason—concerning which reasonable men could not but reason.

If, after His resurrection His flesh had been something altogether different—if it had been something not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible by the human understanding—if the province of reasoning as applied to it had been, therefore, very limited—if the terms employed to describe it had not, and could not have, that precision of meaning which a proof of His resurrection demanded—had this been so, how could His resurrection have been proved, and if His re-

urrection be not proved, reasonably and conclusively proved, where is Christianity itself?

But His flesh after His resurrection was appealed to as matter of sense, and argument, and proof, therefore, it was quite comprehensible by the human understanding, and, therefore, the province of reason as applied to it was perfect; and, therefore, the terms employed to describe it had, and could not but have, the precision of meaning indispensable for establishing the fact that He was, indeed, risen from the dead.

Deny the clear and conclusive province of reason as applied to the risen flesh of Christ, and you cannot prove the resurrection of His body.

Admit the clear and conclusive province of reason as applied to the risen flesh of Christ, and you cannot prove any presence whatever of His flesh in the Lord's Supper. Nay, you can prove its absence, for human reason is altogether competent to the conclusion that what cannot be seen, or felt, or tasted, cannot be flesh, whatever else it may be, and the question here is not about something else, but about flesh.

All this is made clearer still by contrast. Let the subject under consideration be "The Trinity." Here we can have no infallible proofs. We may have, indeed, and we have clear revelation, reasonably attested to be revelation, and, therefore, entitled to acceptance on authority, as little children accept on authority; but the subject-matter is confessedly not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible, by the human understanding. The province of reasoning as applied to it is therefore very limited, and the terms employed in revealing it have not, and cannot have, that precision of meaning which an argument between man and man demands.

Acute controversialists of the Church of Rome have propagated much deception by treating as analogous the mystery of the Trinity and what they call the mystery of the Sacrament. Under cover of this assumed analogy strange bewildering phrases have been introduced and applied to flesh and blood—"spiritual," "supernatural," "sacramental," "mystical," "ineffable," "supralocal."

But there is no ground for this. The mode of the Divine existence is, indeed, a mystery, far beyond the province of human reason; but flesh and blood are not so, and bread and wine are not so; and there is not the slightest intimation in Holy Scripture of any mystery connected with the Lord's Supper. But ecclesiastical tradition? I willingly leave to others the task of exploring that troubled sea, which does indeed "cast up mire and dirt," but I may cordially and devoutly embrace the definition of mysteries as applied to the Lord's Supper in

our Book of Common Prayer—"pledges of His love and for a continual remembrance of His death, to our great and endless comfort."

Furthermore, the presence of Christ in the elements is said to depend on their having been consecrated by a priest. And what evidence is there that they *have* been consecrated, except the evidence of our senses? But, if what looks and feels and tastes like a piece of bread may be a human body, then what looked like a man consecrating it may only have been a piece of bread—our eyes and ears may have altogether deceived us, and the whole scene may have been a pure illusion, without any reality in it whatever; nay, the very book, or what looks like a book, on whose authority we are asked to disbelieve the evidence of our senses, may itself have no real existence. I *think* I am holding something in my hand; I *think* I see certain words in it; but it may be all a delusion. Neither the apparent book, nor myself, nor anything else, may have any actual existence at all—the whole material universe may be a pure imagination, the baseless fabric of a vision.

And this is literally true, as to one part of the Real Presence. For the *blood* of Christ *has* no existence, either in the sacramental cup or anywhere else. There is no such thing as the blood of Christ in all creation. Blood can only belong to a corruptible body; its function is to remove the decayed particles of matter, and to supply their place with fresh matter. There is a continual process of corruption and renovation carried on by means of the blood. The glorified body of Christ is incorruptible, and therefore bloodless. The blood represented by the sacramental wine is the blood of Christ's natural body, which was "shed" on Calvary, and returned to the dust out of which it was formed. When it left his pierced side, it became dead, corrupt matter, and nothing else. Had it been possible to preserve it, it would have been gross

superstition to do so; and worse than superstition to render it any adoration whatever. To drink one drop of it would have been a horrible abomination. To touch the life-blood even of an animal is strictly forbidden—how much more human blood! If the blood which was shed for us were indeed reproduced in the sacramental wine, the direst of all outrages that could be offered to the Saviour would be to let it touch our lips. That it tasted like wine would be no excuse for the impiety; it would be its entrance into our bodies that constituted the abomination. It was because our Lord was using purely figurative language that He could say, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.” It is because the sacramental wine simply and solely represents to our minds the blood which was shed for us on Calvary that we are allowed to drink it. As the blood of the Jewish sacrifices was real blood, it could only be applied by sprinkling. As the blood in our sacrament is no blood at all, but something which represents it, we can use a still stronger symbolical act of personal appropriation by receiving it into our bodies. If the glorified body of Christ were *visibly* present before us, instinctive reverence would no doubt lead us to render Him some outward act of adoration. But if His shed blood were placed before our eyes, or in our hands, nature itself would teach us that there was but one thing to be done—namely, to put it away, out of sight and out of reach, as quickly as possible. Even on the dead body of our blessed Lord, his loving disciples doubtless gazed with fond affection; but who can conceive of their casting a second look on the blood that stained the ground beneath His cross? Yet *that* is what ministers of Christ are supposed to reproduce whenever they administer the Lord's Supper: *that* is what they adore, and teach others to adore: *that* is what is offered us—to *drink*! Can it be possible? It seems like a hideous dream. But, no; it is indeed a

waking reality. This, neither more or less, is the doctrine of the Real Presence, as applied to the cup. And they who believe it, and yet drink of the cup, are doing precisely what John or Mary would have done if they had knelt down and lapped up the blood that streamed at the foot of the cross. That blood—*that* blood—either *is* in the cup, or it is *not*. If it is, then its looking and tasting like wine makes no difference whatever to the morality of drinking it. If it is not, then the doctrine of the Real Presence is a gigantic fiction, alike insulting to our understandings and repulsive to our instincts.

So far from being inclined to speak lightly of it, or of other false doctrines, because they are believed by multitudes of able and pious Christians, it is that very fact which irresistibly compels me to protest against them. The more I love and admire those who are held in bondage by them, the more I abhor the delusions that have power to mislead such men. How they *can* believe such physical and moral impossibilities passes my comprehension. How God can allow it, is a greater mystery still. But not all their piety, ability, or numbers should make us admit one moment's doubt as to whether black is white, or make us shrink from asserting the plain truth in the strongest language we can find. Whoever and whatever they are, we must withstand them to the face, because they are to be blamed. The degree of blame attaching to any individual, we are only too thankful to know, it is not our business to assign. Still more thankful are we to remember, that a time is quickly coming when all delusions will be dispelled, all controversies hushed, and all the children of God know even as they are known. "They shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." So far from our present differences interfering with our concord then, we may be perfectly sure that our erring brethren will only love us the more for having sought to bring them into the way of truth, and to prevent

others being led astray by their teaching, when their eyes are opened to see the real nature of the errors which enslaved them. This thought should help us in the endeavour not to be separated in heart from them now, even though we can give no quarter to their idols, but are compelled, by loyalty to our common Master, to hew them in pieces before the Lord. We are robbing them of no privilege. For, even as regards our Lord's glorified body, the doctrine of the Real Presence is as useless as it is impossible. How would it benefit us to know that Christ was bodily present with us, so long as He remained imperceptible to our senses? We could communicate with Him only by faith, just as we do now. And faith can communicate with Him at the right hand of the Father as freely and instantaneously as if He were standing by our side. Practically, for all the purposes of faith, He is as close to us as He *can* be. To receive Him into our bodies could do us no good whatever. To receive Him into our hearts is the one thing at present needful. And for that we need not bring Him down from heaven; rather should we ourselves thither ascend in heart, and feed upon the Bread of Life by faith with thanksgiving.

Preached on Sunday morning June 30th 1872



